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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA TAKES CENTER-STAGE IN ERITREA

Classified By: CDA Melinda Tabler-Stone for reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: December 25-28 featured a Somali-heavy media weekend. A combination of news articles, radio reports, press conferences, television specials, and roundtable discussions dominated the GSE media, each one with the common theme of condemning the "U.S.-led invasion of Somalia." The hard-line faction of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia took center stage during that weekend via a Saturday morning press conference. However, the message bore little difference from the day-in day-out GSE message of demanding Ethiopia's immediate withdrawal. End Summary.

#### SOMALIA MEDIA OVERLOAD

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12. (C) Friday featured a roundtable discussion featuring Dr. Taisier of the Peacebuilding Center for the Horn of Africa (PCHA); former Somali Ambassador to the UK, Sharif Saleh Mohammed; and former Eritrean Ambassador to the UN, Ahmed Tahir Baduri. The discussion was rebroadcast on Saturday and Sunday. Saturday and Sunday also featured an hour-long special on Somalia on Eri-TV. The tv special ran four times on Saturday and again on Sunday, in either English, Arabic, Tigrinya, or Tigre. The local radio stations broadcast the audio from both the roundtable and the hour-long special as well.

13. (C) The December 27 edition of the Eritrean Profile, the GSE-controlled English newspaper, featured almost exclusively articles on Somalia. Articles included commentary entitled "Somalia: Two Years After the Invasion," an interview with Jama Mohamed Ghalib (Vice Chairman of the hard-line ARS Executive Committee), press releases from both the ARS and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a report covering the Saturday morning ARS press conference.

#### A LOT OF COVERAGE, BUT LITTLE SAID

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14. (C) Despite the inundation of Somali media coverage, little substance or new arguments were introduced on behalf of either the Somalis or their Eritrean interlocutors. According to Dr. Taisier, most of the answers during the roundtable discussion revolved around demanding the immediate withdrawal of Ethiopia from "sovereign Somali territory." Despite Taisier's efforts to encourage the Somalis to take a greater role in their own country, conversation continued to veer towards a rant against an Ethiopia-led/U.S.-backed slaughter of Somalis.

¶5. (C) The MFA and ARS press were mirror images, as has been the case in the past (reftel). Both articles condemned IGAD as Ethiopia's puppet, and both articles were strictly against the presence of external forces such as AMISOM in Somalia. The interview with Jama Mohamed Ghalib also emphasized this with its title "Somali People Have Made It Clear They Don't Want Any External Force In Their Country."

¶6. (C) What none of the Somalia coverage focused on was a concrete ARS plan. Regardless of the media used the message remained focused on blaming the United States for Somalia's woes and pinning the hope of Somalia on Ethiopia's immediate withdrawal. No plans, measures, or proposals were introduced at any point to discuss Somalia's future in the event of Ethiopia's departure.

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